

(3.)  
*The Triumph of Truth:*

BEING AN ACCOUNT OF THE

TRIAL of Mr. <sup>&</sup>ELWALL

BEFORE JUDGE DENTON,

FOR PUBLISHING A BOOK IN DEFENCE

OF

THE UNITY OF GOD;

AT

STAFFORD ASSIZES;

IN THE YEAR 1726.

*It shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.*

Matt. x. 19.

*To us there is one God, the FATHER—and one Mediator  
between God and Men, the MAN, CHRIST JESUS.*

I Cor. viii. 6.—I Tim. ii. 5.

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By W. FRIEND, of JESUS COLLEGE.

# T H E

## P R E F A C E.

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**T**HIS trial is printed from the author's second edition, even without altering such phrases as are peculiar to that denomination of christians with whom he generally associated, and whose style he adopted; and certainly the Quakers ought to think themselves honoured even by this kind of relation to Mr. Elwall. Such firmness in the cause of truth, and such presence of mind in asserting and vindicating it, as appear in this trial, are truly apostolical, and have had but few examples since the first promulgation of christianity. It is impossible for an unprejudiced person to read this account of it (which is written with so much true simplicity, perspicuity, and strength of evidence) without feeling the greatest veneration for the writer, the fullest conviction and love of the truth, and a proportionable zeal in maintaining it. I should even think it impossible for the most prejudiced person to read it attentively, but, if he use no violence with his own mind, he will receive some favourable impressions both of the author, and of that cause, which he supports with such becoming dignity, and with a temper and disposition of mind, in every respect worthy of a true christian.

So great was the force of truth on this memorable occasion, that Mr. Elwall was honourably discharged, tho' he had certainly acted contrary to the express laws of this country, according to which this glorious man ought to have been sentenced to a severe punishment, as a convicted and avowed *blasphemer*. What must a lover of *truth*, and of *free enquiry*, as subservient to truth, think of such laws, and of the ecclesiastical constitution of the countries in which they are in force!

It is to be wished that such a monument of the TRIUMPH OF TRUTH might be constantly held out to the view of all mankind, and particularly in this country where it was exhibited.

The Dedication of the treatise, on account of which Mr. Elwall was prosecuted, is dated the *eighth day of the second month, 1724*; he speaks of his trial in a treatise, entitled, *A declaration against all kings and temporal powers*

*under heaven*, printed in 1732; and Judge Denton, before whom he was tried, went the Oxford circuit in 1726 and 1728. From these circumstances it may be concluded, that the former of these years is the date of this remarkable trial, especially as in some part of the same year 1726, Mr. Elwall published another defence of the unitarian system, in a treatise which he entitled, *Dagon fallen before the Ark of God*, which would probably have been mentioned in the course of the trial, if it had been published at that time.

Since the writing of the above, the Editor has had the pleasure of knowing many of Mr. Elwall's acquaintance, and particularly Mr. John Martin, of Skilts Park, between Birmingham and Alcester, who was present at the trial. He is now in his eighty-fourth year, and perfectly remembers that it was in 1726, and he thinks it was the summer assizes, because the weather was very hot. The reputation of the trial drew many persons to hear it, and himself among the rest; and, being acquainted with some of the sheriff's men, he got a very convenient station, at about an equal distance from the Judge on his left hand, and Mr. Elwall on his right, where he saw and heard to the greatest advantage. The trial, he says, was in the morning, and the figure of Mr. Elwall, who was a tall man, with white hair, a large beard, and flowing garments, struck every body with respect. He spoke about an hour with great gravity, fluency, and presence of mind, but what is printed is the substance of what he said. The Judge gave the most obliging attention to him, and the confusion of the clergy, when he paused, and waited for their answer, as mentioned in the trial, was very visible. During the trial, Mr. Martin says, he was struck with the resemblance of it to that of Paul. He does not recollect that the Jury brought in any verdict, but the Judge said he was at liberty to go where he pleased. It is possible that the trial might not come to a regular termination, on account of Mr. Elwall not having had a copy of the indictment, as mentioned in this account.

## TRIAL OF MR. ELWALL, &amp;c.

**B**ECAUSE so many persons have earnestly desired to read this trial, I have here published a second edition of it, in order to encourage all honest men, who have the eternal law of God on their side, not to fear the faces of priests, who are generally the grand adversaries of liberty and truth, and the bastions and bulwarks of all ceremonies, fopperies, and absurd doctrines that are in the world.

I do this for the glory of the Most High God, and for the honour of his sacred law, and for the good of all my fellow-creatures; that they may obey God, and not man; Christ, and not the pope; the prophets and apostles, and not prelates and priests; and God knoweth this is my sincere desire, that all religion and spiritual things may be perfectly free, neither forced nor hindered; this being the true liberty of the gospel of *Jesus Christ*, who said, *The kings of the Gentiles exercise authority, but it shall not be so with you.*

About fourteen years ago, I wrote a book entitled, “A True Testimony for God and his sacred Law; being a plain, honest defence of the first commandment of God, against all the Trinitarians under heaven, *Thou shalt have no other Gods but me.*” I lived then at *Wolverhampton*, in *Staffordshire*, where my ancestors have lived above eleven hundred years, ever since the *Saxons* conquered the *Britons*.

When this book was published, the priests in the country began to rage, especially the priests of *Wolverhampton*; who had a great hand in the several troubles I underwent. In short, they never ceased till they had procured a large indictment against me at *Stafford* assizes; where I felt the power of God, enabling me to speak before a very great number of people; being accused of heresy, &c. But I truly answered, as my beloved brother *Paul* did in his day, *viz. In that way which some call heresy, so chuse I to serve the God of my fathers, believing all that is written in the law and the prophets.*

After the long indictment was read, I was asked if I pleaded guilty, or not guilty. I said I was not guilty of any evil, that I knew of, in writing that book; but if they meant whether I wrote the book or not (for they had quoted many pages of the book in that indictment) I owned I did write it; and that if I might have liberty to speak, I believed I should make it manifest to be the plain truth of God.

Then the judge stood up and said, “ Mr. *Elwall*, I suppose you have had a copy of your indictment ?” I told him I had not had any copy of it. Upon which he turned towards the priests, and told them that I ought to have had a copy of it. But they not answering, he turned to me, and said, That if I would give bail, and be bound to appear at the next assizes, he would defer my trial till then. But I told him, I would not give bail, neither should any man be bound for me ; that if the Prince of *Wales* himself would, he should not ; for, said I, I have an innocent breast, and I have injured no man ; and therefore I desire no other favour, but that I may have liberty to plead to the indictment myself.

Upon which he said, very courteously, You may. The Judge having given me liberty of pleading to the indictment, I began my speech with the sacred first commandment of God, viz. *Thou shalt have no other Gods but Me.* I insisted upon the word *Me* being a singular ; and that it was plain and certain, that God spake of himself, as one single person or being, and not three distinct persons. And that it was manifest, that all the church of God, which then heard those words, understood it in the same plain obvious sense as I do ; as is most evident from the words of the prophet *Moses* ; who said to *Israel* thus ; *Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know, that the Lord he is God, there is none else besides him ; out of heaven he made thee hear his voice, &c.* I told them, that from the words *he*, and *him*, and *his*, it was certain God was but one single person, one single *he*, or *him*, or *his*. I told them that all the patriarchs from the beginning of the world, did always address themselves to God, as one single being. O thou *Most High God*, possessor of heaven and earth ; and *Abraham* said to the king of *Sodom*, *I have lift up my hand unto the Lord, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth ; &c.* They knew nothing of a trinity, nor of God’s being a plurality of persons ; that monstrous doctrine was not then born, nor of two thousand years after, till the apostacy and Popery began to put up its filthy head.

Then I told them, that all the prophets witnessed to the truth of the same pure uncorrupted unitarian doctrine of one God, and no other but he : *Have we not all one Father, hath not one God created us ?* Then I told them the words of God to *Abraham*, *I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be thou perfect ;* and by the prophet *Isaiah*, *To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the holy One, not the holy Three.*

I told

I told them that the words *Me* and *One* did utterly exclude any other person's being God, but that *One* single *Me*; and that God himself often testifies the same truth, by saying, *Is there any God besides Me?* And then tells us plainly, *There is no God, I know not any: I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God besides me.* *Isaiah xlv. 5.*

Now, said I, let God be true, but every man a liar, that is, every man that contradicteth him; for he is the God of truth; he says, *I lift up my hand to heaven, I say, I live for ever.*

After I had pleaded many texts in the Old Testament, I began to enter the New; and told them, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the prophet, like unto *Moses*, held forth the same doctrine that *Moses* had done; for when a certain ruler came to ask him which was the first and great commandment (or how he expounded it) he told him the same words that *Moses* had said. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord, not three, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c.* And the scribe said, *Thou hast answered right, for there is but one God, and there is no other but he, &c.* Then I mentioned the words of Christ, in the xviith of *John* and ver. 3, as very remarkable and worthy of all their observation: *This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* And then I turned my face directly to the priests (my prosecutors, who all stood on the right side of the judge) Now said I, since the lips of the blessed Jesus, which always spoke the truth, say, his Father is the only true God; who is he, and who are they that dare set up another, in contradiction to my blessed Lord, who says, his Father is *the only true God*?

And I stopped here, to see if any of them would answer; but the power of God came over them, so that all their mouths were shut up, and not one of them spake a word. So that I turned about over my left shoulder, and warned the people in the fear of God, not to take their religious sentiments from men, but from God; not from the Pope, but from Christ; not from Prelates not Priests, but from the Prophets and Apostles.

And then I turned towards the judge and told him, that I was the more convinced of the truth of what I had said, from the words of my blessed Lord; who said, *Call no man Father here upon earth; for one is your Father, even God. And call no man Master, for one is your Master, even Christ.* From hence, said I, I deduce this natural inference, that in all things that are of a spiritual nature, we ought to take our religion from God and his prophets, from Christ and his apostles.

apostles. It will be too long to mention all the texts and proofs that I made use of; I will only add one or two, as that of *Paul*, 1. Cor. viii. 4, 5, 6, where the apostle tells us, *There is no other God but one; for though there be that are called gods (as there be gods many, and lords many) both in heaven and earth; but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things: so that I told them here was a plain demonstration; for he says, there is but one God; and tells us who that one God is, that is, the Father. And therefore no other person could be God but the Father only; and what I had written in my book was the plain truth, and founded on God's own words, Thou shalt have no other Gods but me.*

In short, I could plainly perceive there was a general convincement through the court. The judge and justices of the peace did not like the prosecution; but saw plainly, that *out of envy the priests had done it.* I then began to set before them the odious nature of that hell-born principle of persecution, and that it was hatched in hell; that it never came from Jesus Christ; that he and his followers were often persecuted themselves, but they never persecuted any; that we had now a very flagrant instance of it in the papists at *Thorn*; where they first took away the schools where our brethren the protestants educated their children; then they took away the places of their religious worship; then they put them in prisons; then confiscated their estates, and, last of all, took away their lives.

Now we can cry out loud enough against this, and shew the inhumanity, cruelty, and barbarity of it; but, said I, if we, who call ourselves protestants, shall be found acting in the same spirit, against others, the crime will be greater in us than in them; because we have attained to greater degrees of light than they.

However, I told them, that I had put my house in order, and made up my accounts with all men as near as I could: and that as I owed no man here any thing, so I would not pay a penny towards this prosecution. And that I was sure of it, that whatever fine they laid on me, or whatever hole or prison, said I, you thrust me into, I shall find God's living presence with me, as I feel it this day: And so ended my speech.

Upon this a justice of the peace, one *Rupert Humpatch*, got up, went to the judge, laid his hand upon the judge's shoulder, and said, My Lord, I know this man to be an honest man; and what I say, I speak not by hear-say, but experience; for I was his next door neighbour three years.

Also,

Also, another justice spoke to the same effect. Then the judge spoke to me; Mr. *Elwall*, I perceive you have studied very deeply into this controversy; but have you ever consulted any of our reverend clergy, and bishops of the church of *England*. I answered, Yes, I have; and among others, the Archbishop of *Canterbury* himself, with whom I have exchanged ten letters, viz. four I have had from him, and six he had from me. [At which words, all the priests stared very earnestly.] Well, says the judge, and was not the archbishop able to give you some satisfaction in these points, Mr. *Elwall*? I said, No; but rather quite the reverse; for that in all the letters I sent to the archbishop, I grounded my arguments upon the words of God and his prophets, Christ and his apostles; but in his answers to me, he referred me to acts of parliament, and declarations of state, &c. whereas I told the bishop, in one of my letters, that I wondered a man of his natural and acquired abilities, should be so weak as to turn me over to human authorities, in things of a divine nature; for though in all things that are of a temporal nature, and concern the civil society, *I will be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake*; even from the king upon the throne, down to the meanest officer in the land; yet in things that are of a spiritual nature, and concern my faith, my worship of God, and future state, *I would call no man father upon earth*, nor regard either popes or councils, prelates or priests of any denomination, nor convocations, nor assemblies of divines; but obey God and his prophets, Christ and his apostles. Upon which the judge answered, Well, if his Grace of *Canterbury* was not able to give you satisfaction, Mr. *Elwall*, I believe I shall not; and so sat down and rested him; for I think he had stood up for near an hour and a quarter.

Then he stood up again, and turning to the priests, talked softly to them. I did not hear what he said, or what they said to him; but I guessed from what the judge said next; for, says he, Mr. *Elwall*, you cannot but be sensible that what you have written, being contrary to the commonly received doctrines of the church, it has given offence to some of your neighbours, and particularly to the clergy; are you willing to promise, before the face of the country here, that you will not write any more on this head? I answered, God forbid that I should make thee any such promise; for when I wrote this book, I did it in the fear of God; and I did not write it to please the church of *Rome*, nor

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nor the church of *England*, nor the church of *Scotland*; but to please that God who gave me my breath; and therefore, if at any time I find myself drawn forth to write in defence of this sacred first commandment, or any other of the ten, I hope I shall do it in the same spirit of sincerity as I have done this. And I perceived the judge was not in any wise displeased at my honest, plain, bold answer; but rather his heart seemed to be knit in love to me; and he soon declared me acquitted: and then the clerk of the arraigns, or assizes, stood up, and said, Mr. *Elwall* you are acquitted; you may go out of court when you please.

So I went away through a very great croud of people (for it was thought there was a thousand people at the trial) and having spoken long I was a-thirst, so went to a well and drank. Then I went out of town by a river-side, and looking about and seeing no one near, I kneeled down on the bank of the river, and sent up my thank offering to that good God who had delivered me out of their hands.

By the time that I returned to the town, the court was up and gone to dinner; a justice of peace and another person met me, and would have me to eat and drink with them, which I did; and afterwards, as I was walking along the street, some persons hove up a great sash-window and invited me up to them; and when I entered the room I found ten or a dozen persons, most of them justices of the peace; and amongst them a Priest, whom they called Doctor. One of the justices took me by the hand, and said, Mr. *Elwall*, I am heartily glad to see you, and I was glad to hear you bear your testimony so boldly as you did. Yea, says another justice, and I was glad to see Mr. *Elwall* come off with flying colours as he did: Upon which the Priest said (in a very bitter manner) *He ought to have been hanged.* I turned unto him, and said, Friend, I perceive thou dost not know what spirit thou art of; for the son of man came not to destroy, but to save: But thou wouldest have me destroyed. Upon which one of the justices said, How, now Doctor, did not you hear one of the justices say, that he was an honest man, and that what he said, was not by hear-say, but by experience, and would you have honest men hanged, Doctor? Is this good doctrine? So that the Priest said but little more for some time: So I took leave of the justices, and took horse for *Wolverhampton*, for I knew there would be great joy in my family, for the common people all expected to hear of my being fined and imprisoned. But a farmer that lived near, who had been upon the jury at *Stafford* got

got to town before me, and the people went all up and asked him, What have they done to Mr. Elwall? Have they put him in prison; He answered "No, he preached there an hour together, and our parsons could say never a word. What must they put him in prison for? I told our foreman of the jury, Mr. Elwall was an honest man, and his father was an honest man, I knew him very well," so they were all damped. But there was great joy in my family, and amongst all my friends: Praises, living praises be attributed to that good God who delivered me out of their hands!

Christ never told us of that scandalous popish invention, of his human nature praying to his divine nature; but like a true obedient son of God, submitted to death, even that cruel death which the hatred and envy of persecuting wicked priests inflicted on him, because he had so plainly and truly told them all their blindness covetousness, pride, and hypocrisy. And therefore *God raised him from the dead*; and for his faithfulness, *God has exalted him to be a prince and a saviour* to all those that obey that pure doctrine which God gave him to teach; *that denying ungodliness and sinful lusts, we should live soberly and righteously in this world. Then are we his disciples indeed, when we do those things that he hath commanded.* Then shall we be saved, not by the merits of Christ, that is another popish invention; for he never did any thing but what was his duty to do, and therefore could not merit any thing for others; but he taught us the true way to find acceptance with God, and that was by *doing the will of his Father which is in heaven; and therein he is the way, the life*, because *no one cometh unto the Father, but by that way.*

Neither did he make satisfaction unto God for us. It was impossible; and what God never required: But he who had no pleasure in the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn from wickedness and live, out of the immeasurable height and depth of his love, directed our Lord Jesus Christ to teach mankind a never-failing way of being reconciled to God; and that was by sincere repentance and reformation. This was the gospel, or good tidings, of Jesus Christ, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* He tells us, *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*; and by that beautiful excellent parable of the prodigal son, he illustrates the tender mercy of his God, and our God, of his Father and our Father, without any satisfaction. The compassionate Father required none at all, but humble confession and submission, with sincere repentance, and reformation,

reformation, and then comes *the best robe, the ring, the shoes, and the fatted calf*, to demonstrate the paternal acceptance without satisfaction or sacrifice, *but a broken and a contrite heart which he will never refuse*; for he can as soon cease to be God, as cease to be merciful.

And as to the trinitarians, nothing is more plain, than that they feed upon ashes; *a deceived heart hath turned them aside*, because they will not make use of those rational faculties which God hath given them; nor say, *Is there not a lie in my right hand?* otherwise they would never flatter the humble *Jesus*, nor make the most high God to be a plurality of persons.

For as to the Holy Ghost (their third God) it is evidently no distinct person from God, any more than a man's spirit is a distinct person from the man; so that the Spirit of God is God's spirit; as is manifest from scripture and reason, Gen. vi. 3. *My spirit shall not always strive with man: And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters: And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters. And God made all things by the word of his power.* So that the word of God, and the spirit of God, are not distinct persons from God, but the power of God, and the energy of God. So the word of a man, and the spirit of a man, are not distinct persons from the man, but the man himself; if his word be false, or his spirit be wicked, the man is false and wicked.

The same degree of stupidity that leads trinitarians to call the word of God, and the spirit of God, distinct persons, would lead them to call the wisdom of God, the goodness of God, the love of God, the peace of God, the power of God, and mercy of God, distinct persons; and make God to be a trinity of trinities; for it is certain, God is expressly called by all those names.

But whosoever goes about to father this absurd and horrid doctrine of the trinity upon *Jesus Christ*, do egregiously abuse him; who told us plainly, *his Father was greater than he; and that he could do nothing of himself*, which is a demonstration that he is not God: For we are sure God is omnipotent, and can do all things of himself; being self-existent and independent, the supreme creator of the universe; and in this it is, that the unitarians triumph; unanswerable, believing in *Jesus Christ*, who told us his Father was *the only true God*, John xvii. 3.

P. S. By these last words of *Christ*, I myself was convinced many years ago.